

## A brief history of Montmorency

When the land was first subdivided in the late 1830's, Stuart A Donaldson (1812-1867), first premier of NSW, purchased land and named it "Montmorenci Estate", after the town where French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau had lived, in France.



### "The Montmorenci Estate, Port Phillip"

A plan of the original 925 acre Crown Grant to S.A. Donaldson on 5th February, 1840 superimposed onto a satellite image of the district.

*Click on the image for a larger version*

Donaldson never lived on "Montmorenci Estate". References have been made to "The prolific forest on Montmorency Estate". As can be seen from the newspaper excerpt below, the land was considered worthy of comparison with neighbouring properties; however, the advertisement makes no effort to promote the suitability of the property for any particular farming endeavour, which may suggest that Donaldson did little to improve the land after acquiring the Crown Grant on the 5th February 1840. Those with a keen eye will note that the auction advertisement is dated 28th March 1840 - less than two months after its acquisition from the Crown. A prime example of the land speculation that was rife in the new colony at that time.

**By The Australian Auction Company,**  
THIS DAY the 28th Instant, immediately after the splendid Port Phillip Farms offered for sale by the Company on that day, will be submitted to Public Competition, the finely Watered Estate of  
**"MONTMORENCI,"**  
**SITUATED** on the River Plenty, within two miles of the celebrated Heidelberg Estate, and within ten miles of Melbourne, extending at the back portion to within one mile and a quarter of the Yarra Yarra River, having a frontage to the Plenty of one mile and a half.  
Mr. Coultstock's well-known Farm is on the opposite side of the River Plenty, the Crops grown on which have been most luxuriant.  
The Montmorenci Estate contains by a measurement 925 Acres, and will be sold in one Lot.  
Terms very liberal, made known at Sale.

**The Montmorenci Estate, Port Phillip.**

**A FINISHED PLAN** of this Estate, shewing its position with regard to the River Plenty, and Yarra Yarra, as well as a general sketch of the neighbouring Properties, is now ready for the inspection of intending purchasers, and lies at the Auction Mart.

*Terms for the Montmorenci Estate.*  
Ten per cent. cash deposit; the residue by approved bills at 6, 9, and 12 months, the last to bear Bank interest; or, at the option of the buyer, 25 per cent. cash deposit; residue to remain secured on the property by mortgage for five years, at 10 per cent. per annum.

An excerpt from "The Sydney Gazette and NSW Advertiser newspaper 28th March 1840 (page 3). Note the spelling of Montmorency.

In the 1840's, the land was sold to Judge James Donnithorne (1773-1852) who ran the farm through Managers. He never lived there. On his death, the property was left to his daughter Elizabeth E. Donnithorne. Prior to her father's death, Elizabeth E. Donnithorne (1826-1886), who was engaged to be married, was jilted at the altar. She lived the remainder of her life (approx 35 years) as a recluse in New South Wales. Charles Dickens's, Miss Havisham, in his book Great Expectations, is said to be based on Elizabeth's life.

The land was sold some time after her death in 1886. In her will, she stipulated "the land was not to be sold until land prices increased". The next owner may have been Mr Britnell. In 1907, the property was subdivided and sold by Mr Britnell. It was about this time that Montmorency and Briar Hill then became independent suburbs in their own right from the district known as Greensborough.

## History

---



Photos of Montmorency Railway Station (ca 1923-1928)  
*State Library of Victoria*

### A few milestones in Montmorency's history:

- Presbyterian Church built in 1917.
- Primary school opened 1922.
- Post office opened 1923
- Railway station constructed in 1923
- Electricity connected in 1926
- St Faith's private school, in Mountain View Road, opened 1917 and run by Miss Green

The above article was prepared by June Hall, leader of the Society's oral history group. As is the case with the research of historic places like Montmorency, there are the inevitable gaps in the records of history including those elusive early photographs of the district, family stories and records of people and events.